

Introduction

The Sonoran UCEDD at the University of Arizona contracted with the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) to obtain public comment on the draft of the 2011-2016 Five Year Plan. The goal of this effort was to collect public input on the Council's plan and provide the Council with a summary report on that input. This report includes a review of the public comments, as well as a detailed description of the mechanics of the public sessions including their location, design, and how the public was notified of the public comment sessions.

Organization of the Public Sessions

In consultation with the ADDPC it was decided that, given Arizona's geographic layout, three separate public comment sessions should be held: One in Flagstaff, one in Phoenix, and one in Tucson. It was the responsibility of the Sonoran UCEDD staff to organize, advertise, and recruit participants. Decisions on the actual content of the sessions including how to communicate most effectively the 5-year plan's content, was a collaborative effort of the ADDPC and Sonoran UCEDD. A principle aim of the public sessions was to create a collaborative and open process through which all attendees would gain a clear understanding of the framework and substance of the 5-year plan and be able to comment on the plan.

Notice of the sessions began circulating 5 to 6 weeks prior to the first session. Press advisories were placed in the public notice sections of the Arizona Daily Star, the Arizona Republic, the Arizona Daily Sun, the Arizona Capitol Times, the Phoenix New Times, the Tucson Weekly, the Jewish News of Greater Phoenix, the Navajo Hopi Observer, the Navajo Times, the Times of Fountain Hills, and the East Valley Tribune (Mesa).

Notice was circulated to the following DD related non-profit groups and organizations: The ADDPC, the Sonoran UCEDD, the Institute for Human Development (NAU-UCEDD), the Arizona Center for Disability Law, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Raising Special Kids, Pilot Parents of Southern AZ, People First (Tucson and statewide chapters), the Self-Advocacy Coalition of Arizona, the AZ Bridge to Independent Living, DIRECT Center for Independence, New Horizons Independent Living Center, S.M.I.L.E. - Services Maximizing Independent Living Empowerment, Tucson Alliance for Autism, Best Buddies Arizona, the African-American Autism Support Network, the Arizona Council for Exceptional Children, the Arizona Disability Advocacy Coalition, the Autism Society chapters in Tucson and Phoenix, the Down Syndrome Connection, the Down Syndrome Network of Arizona, Kids with Autism Can, Sharing Down Syndrome Arizona, the Southern Arizona Network for Down Syndrome, and the ARC of Arizona

The three locations identified were all ADA accessible and the notices advertising the sessions made it clear that anybody needing special assistance would be accommodated. All sites were well known and easy to locate ground-floor locations near mass transit corridors and with ample parking. The first session was held on June 27th in Phoenix at the Disability Empowerment Center. Session two was held on June 29th in Tucson at the Woods branch of the Pima County Public Library. Session three was held on July 6th in Flagstaff at the Aquaplex, a brand-new city-owned community, exercise, and recreation facility in Flagstaff.

In total, 37 people attended the three public sessions. According to sign-up sheets, Twenty-two people attended the Phoenix session on July 27th. Half (11) identified themselves as providers, another 9 identified as advocates (including 2 Council members), and 3 were parents. In Tucson, 10 people attended the public session. Again half (5) identified as providers, 4 as advocates, and 1 identified as family. Flagstaff had the smallest turnout with 5 participants --- 3 providers and 2 advocates. It is always a challenge convincing people to come to these events given the time and energy required, particularly on hot summer days in Phoenix and Tucson. We would have liked to see larger numbers of persons with developmental disabilities and their families, but we are confident that our efforts were sufficiently robust to make people aware of the public sessions. We also know that a sizeable group of people participated in the Council's on-line survey of the 5-year plan.

Each session was organized around a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the goals and objectives of the 5-year plan, followed by a question and answer period. The PowerPoint also provided a brief introduction to the ADDPC, the Comprehensive Review and Analysis, and its connection to developing the new 5-Year Plan. The PowerPoint presentation is attached to this report. Two experienced facilitators from the Sonoran UCEDD organized each session, with the ADDPC's Executive Director on hand to respond to questions and comments from the public. ADPPC council members were also present at 2 of the 3 public sessions. Written notes of public comments and questions were taken using an easel and whiteboard with detachable sheets. Participants could then see what had been said throughout the course of the session and use the notes to reference and reflect back on questions and comments. Participants were also provided with hardcopies of the PowerPoint presentation and encouraged to take them home or back to their office for further reflection. The Executive Director of the ADDPC provided participants with contact information including email and telephone and told to contact the ADDPC with any questions or comments.

Summary of Participant Comments

After each goal and approach (objective) to each goal were summarized and explained, participants were asked for and encouraged to respond by way of comments and questions. The summary that follows lists the key features of the public sessions across the three sessions for the goals and objectives of the 5-Year Plan.

Goal 1: Self-Advocacy (Build a self-advocacy alliance comprised of diverse advocacy organizations the is led by people with developmental disabilities)

All three sessions asked about the rationale for determining how self-advocacy groups would become involved in the alliance. There was widespread support among those attending all three sessions for the creation of a sustainable, robust, and diverse self-advocacy network. No one opposed making this a goal of the 5-Year Plan. Some participants noted that the initial and ongoing outreach to existing and nascent self-advocacy groups be as inclusive as possible. There was also some discussion around what diversity means, to include not only socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, but also a diversity of developmental disabilities, geographic diversity (e.g. urban vs. rural), as well as the diversity of ideas or intellectual approaches to developmental disabilities.

Some asked about what the role of the ADDPC would be in the development of a statewide alliance. Again, wanting to ensure that a wide range of self-advocacy groups and voices have a role in the process. This was important to participants across all three sessions. Ensuring that the alliance was sustainable across time was also of key importance to participants; some people wanted to be reassured that once a robust network was created, that it would have the resources necessary to sustain itself and not be allowed to, essentially fall apart. There were also a range of questions and comments about the mechanics of creating an alliance that included such issues as how to create and maintain interest and commitment among existing self-advocacy groups; using social networks technology to facilitate and sustain the creation of a self-advocacy alliance. One or two people were concerned that there might be a numerical cap on the size of the alliance and needed reassurance that there would not be arbitrary restrictions on what groups participate in the alliance. One or two people asked about the timeline for implementation of goal one.

Goal 2: Community Integrated Employment (In partnerships with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, others who support them, and employers, advocate and expand capacity for community integrated employment)

Participants across all three sessions asked about the meaning of integrated employment and how it differed from other approaches such as supported employment. Once it was explained and everyone appeared to understand the meaning of integrated employment, all three sessions evidence widespread support for enhancing community-integrated employment. No one opposed making this a goal of the 5-Year Plan. Some participants expressed concern that resources should not be diverted from other employment approaches to support this goal. One person suggested supported employment individuals and groups be involved in this process. Another suggested that integrated employment is part of a continuum that includes supported employment.

Other questions and comments revolved around how to reach out to new employers to involve them in this process, what existing best-practice models might drive this process, and the benefits of integrated employment to employers and employees. There was some discussion about the effects of budget cuts on integrated employment. Outreach to underserved and un-served areas of the state was a concern to some. Others wanted to understand the relationship between transition issues and integrated employment. Some wanted to understand more clearly the role of the Council in Goal 2, and there was some discussion around models or approaches to integrated employment including the role of entrepreneurship, business leadership and the role of small business.

Goal 3: Trusted Source of Information (Empower people with developmental disabilities, their families, and people who support them by linking them to information that promotes informed decision-making about their choices and their quality of life)

There was widespread support among those attending all three sessions for Goal 3, but more than one person pointed out that information needs to pertain to all areas of the state and not disproportionately favor Maricopa County. There was considerable

discussion about how to achieve this goal following the objectives established by the plan. Some emphasized the importance and utility of partnering with existing organizations to gather and disseminate timely and accurate information. More than one person suggested working closely with the Division of Developmental Disabilities to reach into traditionally hard-to-reach underserved areas of the state. Others talked about the importance of using technology as a bridge to reach consumers and providers of services and supports. This brought up the challenge of reaching people in isolated areas with limited access to the Internet. There appeared to be some consensus on using a variety of methods to link people to information, both high tech and low tech, ranging from traditional hardcopy technology to social networks, Facebook and Twitter.

Others talked about the utility of using existing medical and social service providers as conduits of information, including providing information to nurses in healthcare settings and caseworkers in social service settings. Again, there was significant concern about how to reach rural and other underserved areas of the state. Some talked specifically about developing a marketing plan and a resource directory available in multiple formats. The bottom line concern for many was having access to timely and relevant information using a variety of tailored delivery mechanisms.

Conclusion

On the whole, public response to the 5-Year Plan developed by the Council was quite positive. While there were minor pockets of gentle skepticism over some implementation strategies noted above, the vast majority of participants supported the plan and expressed a desire to see it implemented according to the approaches and timelines discussed.